Interview with William G. Bradford

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM G. BRADFORD

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: March 9, 1989

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you become interested in foreign affairs?

BRADFORD: The following story is only half in jest. I was in a hospital in Paris at the end of World War II. Through friends in Kentucky, I met a young lady at the American Embassy, who was what was then called a code clerk, and I got onto the diplomatic party circle. As a private in the Army with three years' background, I found that duty-free liquor was an incredible benefit, and decided at that point I was interested in the Foreign Service. I think I thought that liquor was free, not duty-free. From that point on, I learned a little more about the Service, but my interests remained.

Q: What sort of background had you had in studies? Did you go in as a non-college person when you went in?

BRADFORD: Yes. I quit high school to join the Army. I served three years, went back to the University of Indiana after the war, and like most young men in those days, I was in a great hurry. I went through school in approximately two years. Again, having the Foreign Service in view, somehow I managed to take what were called exemption tests for all foreign languages. So I got through school having two years of high school Spanish, and

thought I was going to go abroad and work the rest of my life. It didn't work out quite that way.

Q: What happened?

BRADFORD: I took the Foreign Service exam two years running. In those days, it was a three-day exam.

Q: Three and a half days.

BRADFORD: Actually, three and a half days. The one-half was a language.

Q: I remember that vividly! (Laughs)

BRADFORD: You remember, also, that a great deal of it was a written exam. You wrote page after page after page. When they got all through grading, the first two years I failed the exam by one-tenth of a point each year. I had 69.9, and 70 was passing. At that point, I became discouraged. I had had a job elsewhere in insurance and selling lumber. I was married at the time. I sort of gave it up. However, I found the other jobs were not really terribly fulfilling, and my wife encouraged me to take it one more time. So we took it again after a one-year layoff, and we passed it rather easily.

We came to that half-day language exam I spoke of, and I passed it by memorizing a small Spanish dictionary. I could not speak a word of Spanish, nor could I really read it, but I could pick out a lot of words. Somehow I staggered through it, and they thought I spoke Spanish. That's how I came into the Foreign Service.

Q: Let's get some dates here. You came into the Foreign Service when?

BRADFORD: 1952.

Q: That was a particularly bad period, wasn't it?

BRADFORD: Yes.

Q: Could you explain why?

BRADFORD: It was during the McCarthy days, big cutbacks in the Service, and so forth. However, as a young man, it didn't really affect me. I could be outraged about it and so forth, but nobody was looking down my neck and saying, “Oh, he must be a red.” (Laughs)

Q: How about with the senior officers? Were you noticing the effects of McCarthyism at the time?

BRADFORD: Frankly, in those days there wasn't that much of a floor between senior and junior officers. How senior officers felt, I didn't know, unless they didn't like what I'd written that day.

Q: You entered the Foreign Service a little before I did. I came in in 1955. There had been some great upheaval under the Wriston program. How did you view the Foreign Service, looking at the senior officers? You were coming from Indiana, having been a private in the Army. I came from somewhat the same background. But how did you view the Foreign Service, particularly the older officers, at that time?

BRADFORD: I think I viewed them with tremendous respect. I think it was part of the system that you viewed senior officers with tremendous respect. But they had this worldly knowledge, ability with languages, that I did not have, they knew the mysteries of the Foreign Service that I was still trying to learn, and I would say that I had no problem with that at all. I can't remember any officer that I thought, “Oh, he's a real dud.”

Q: You didn't feel that they were a little prescient or anything like that?

BRADFORD: No. If I did, I thought it only with envy.

Q: Looking at your assignments, the first two, you were a public safety officer in Berlin. That was 1952-55. What was that?

BRADFORD: Public Safety Division in Berlin was formed to work with the German police, which were completely controlled by the old kommandatura. By that time the Russians had walked out. So it was a tripartite arrangement between the British, the French, and ourselves, which ran the German police force in Berlin. The German police force was more than a police force; it was actually a paramilitary force. It had several large battalions. Those were armed, and this was all part of the public safety responsibility.

Q: These were designed, really, to worry about mobs and this type of thing?

BRADFORD: Really almost a little further than that. They had some medium-sized weapons and so forth and would be considered reinforcements for the military forces that were in Berlin in those days. There were approximately 3,000, I think.

Q: What type of work were you doing?

BRADFORD: The nature of this was that most of the people who were in it were former police officers. The head of it was the former head of the Michigan State Police. There were several ex-detectives. In those days, as you know, all the communications with the Department were basically written communications. They found that none of these policemen could write, so they assigned one Foreign Service officer to the operations, whose basic responsibility was to write all the reports and keep the Department informed of what was going on.

This was later expanded into what I considered a fascinating job, where I was responsible for the border of Berlin. Each time a new barricade was put up, it was my responsibility to take pictures of it and explain it. I had a map of where all the barricades were in the city. This was before the wall.

Q: Yes. You must have felt that you'd entered into the world of high intrigue. It was a great start to your career.

BRADFORD: It was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it immensely. I was there during the East German riots. Because I was responsible for the border, I was in the border during the riots. As a young man interested in this kind of thing, it was a fascinating place.

Q: How close did you feel we were to war at that point? I was in a barracks in Germany as an enlisted man, and we were confined to barracks, which is the first step into a war situation. This is '53.

BRADFORD: I don't honestly remember even having considered that to be a possibility. Possibly I wasn't thinking far enough down the line. My responsibilities were there on the border, reporting what was going on. But that we would react in a situation of war just never occurred to me.

Q: Moving rather quickly on, you were then a visa officer in Naples. How did you find that? What type of work were you doing?

BRADFORD: Actually, I moved from public safety in Berlin into the consular section, and I was a visa officer there in Berlin for a while. Then I moved to Naples, and this was during the days of the Refugee Relief Act.

Q: 1955 to '58.

BRADFORD: Correct. It was something to be expected. In those days, we all went through the consular work, a little bit of everything. It was not terribly fascinating in itself. However, in Naples I ran into a situation in which a huge operation was going on. Visas were being really ground out—that's the right term. We were expected to issue lots of visas every day. Congress expected it. They passed a law. They wanted these people to go to the United States. There was tremendous pressure on them.

I found that I had a flair for management that I didn't know I had, which was that I was able to put together how you made this thing happen with lots of red tape and so forth, but how you got through that to issue a lot of visas every day. I started out at the bottom of the totem pole, and by 1958, I was in charge of the section. It was a very large section. We were issuing well over 300 immigrant visas a day, and I had a staff of approximately 50 Americans.

Q: This was the same development that happened in Frankfurt, I know. I was involved in that. This is a refugee program, and you're in Italy. Who were the refugees?

BRADFORD: If you remember, the refugee program had two parts to it. One was a refugee portion, and there were a lot of East Europeans that were handled there. Naples, while it's on the southern end of Italy, no immigrant visas were issued in Rome. So therefore, most of what happened in the immigrant field happened down in southern Italy, and we were geared to handle it. We handled a great many Hungarians, Bulgarians, and that kind of thing.

However, the biggest part of the act was that it increased the quota for relatives of people already in the United States, and this included thousands and thousands of Italians, particularly southern Italians.

Q: With your management experience, then, is this really what set you off in the administrative field?

BRADFORD: In a way, it was, but in a way that I think was peculiar to the Foreign Service, which is so much in the Foreign Service, that is personal. In those days, Bill Crockett was the administrative counselor in Rome. Crockett became familiar with my work in Naples, and we knew each other, not well, but from time to time, and he liked what he saw. Later on, he asked me to join him when he was Assistant Secretary for Administration, which is

one step removed, really. When I left Naples, I came back and worked in the Secretariat for a couple of years.

Q: You were first in the Secretariat. This is when?

BRADFORD: 1958 to 1960.

Q: Was this much of an operation in those days?

BRADFORD: A very different operation than the one that it is today. The Secretariat, among its normal responsibilities, had one oddball prepared, which was called the top-secret summary for the President, the Secretary, and others. This meant that an officer came in at approximately 2:00 in the morning and started reading all the telegrams that had arrived from anywhere in the world from the time the Secretary had left the building the night before. This continued until approximately 6:00. He took what he considered the most important telegrams that came in, and prepared a summary of those telegrams. There was no such thing as an operations center or anything else. This officer, from 2:00 until some writers joined him at approximately 4:30, was the senior officer in the State Department. If something came in that was really hot, he was called, and it was up to him to call the Secretary or call whoever was appropriate for whatever was hot.

I found myself in that job. It was a rotating job when I was in it, that you had it for two weeks, and then four weeks you were off. By the time I left, I had it permanent, and I was there every night. Again, it was an absolutely fascinating job. For that brief period of time that I was in the Department of State, I made no decisions, except who to call, but I was up to date on everything that was happening in the world, and this included the eyes-only traffic.

Q: Compared to what we would see today, we're talking about a less organized Department of State. Looking at it through the eyes of a manager, do you think it was an effective way to do this, or have we over-bureaucratized things?

BRADFORD: I think the answer lies halfway between the two. I sometimes shudder to think that we would leave a junior officer, with as little experience as I had, in such a senior position, really, overnight. I don't think that was really a wise idea. On the other hand, I feel that here's something that was done by one man that's now done by 20, 30, I don't even know. It was done efficiently enough, I gather. We didn't fall apart during those times. Others besides myself had it. So I think the answer probably lies somewhere between the two.

Q: Then you worked with Bill Crawford.

BRADFORD: Right. After two years in the Secretariat, Bill asked me to join him. He was then the Assistant Secretary for Administration.

Q: This is an important era in the administration of the Department. Crockett, as anybody who is important, really had an effect, and was a controversial figure. One talks about the "Crockett years," but they don't talk about most other people who were involved in administration. I wonder if you could talk about his style of operations, what you all were after and what you were doing.

BRADFORD: His style of operations started from the premise that the Department was terribly managed, and I think he was probably right.

Q: What year did you start with him?

BRADFORD: I started with him in 1960, and he had been there, I think, six or nine months at that time. He wanted to, in effect, bring the Department up to today's knowledge of management. In so doing, he wanted to simplify and change a great many things. He worked under the premise that he was only going to be there a certain amount of time, and that, therefore, changes had to be made rapidly. He frequently said, "If we each make a change that is wrong, we can always change it back."

When I joined him, my first responsibility was to reduce the number of reports required by the Foreign Service regulations for everybody in every field. The first thing was to catalog them all, and there were thousands of them. We then had brief talks—and I mean very brief—with the people who got these reports and what they did with them. In most cases, they were, of course, very defensive of the report. We then went through with a red pencil, and I had a group of five people with me, and we eliminated any where we did not think the defense was very well taken. In fact, we eliminated any of those where we found we didn't think we were really using the people or were very smart.

Q: What were the people defensive about?

BRADFORD: If your job is to keep track of all of the gray paint in the United States Government abroad, and somebody is in charge of sending you a monthly report on gray paint, you want that monthly report. You don't want an annual report, nor do you want a report that just covers all paint. You want the gray-paint report. Without the gray-paint report, you probably won't have a job. This is very understandable. But nevertheless, we were able to eliminate, I think, 500 to 700 reports. We made some mistakes. We eliminate some things that probably we really needed. But as I say, Bill's thought was, “We can always put them back.” That was a tremendous paper-saving and time-saving thing, and it was the kind of thing he was in at that particular point.

I then became his special assistant and got into a broader range of things. You are absolutely right that Bill was very controversial. But there are some things he did that I thought were absolutely wonderful, and the Foreign Service should be grateful. We found, through the tragic death of an officer in Africa, that our entire medical evacuation system was terrible.

Q: Is this Jim Carson?

BRADFORD: No, this is not Jim. This was Bob—I knew him well, but I can't think of the name. At any rate, he was in Ouagadougou at the time. We didn't even really recognize that for a medical evacuation to occur, the Department had to say, “All right.” The field had no responsibility to evacuate a man, no matter how sick he was. This fellow was taken sick in Ouagadougou, they sent a telegram to the Department, the telegram got mislaid someplace, and no response was ever sent. He died while they were waiting for authorization to evacuate. Bill heard about this, and the next day the entire system was changed. The field was given not only the authority, but the responsibility, for medical evacuation. If you had a sick man on your hands in the field, you were to send him out. There were lots of things like this that happened in Bill's time which I consider just tremendous benefits to the Foreign Service.

Q: Did you see any sort of disputes with other parts of the Department? It wasn't only these logical things, but there were other administrative things that really cut to the bone, as far as the geographic bureaus and other places.

BRADFORD: There were. When you come to trying to streamline or reorganize, you are bound to step on some people's toes. It was done often almost arbitrarily. These things all hurt, and they made enemies for Bill. I think, in some cases, the enemies were correct, in addition to which when you came to the point of moving something that was in bad shape into what Bill considered the modern era, we ended up with all of the gimmicks of new management. I can remember, particularly, the sensitivity training. Everybody had to go to sensitivity training.

Q: Could you describe this? This was in an era past, but I think readers should know what you're talking about.

BRADFORD: Sensitivity training was that you were supposed to go with a group of people, and they were supposed to tell you, in effect, what was wrong with you. You were with people that worked for you, who told you what a terrible boss you were, and

all these good reasons. You were supposed to sit there and learn from this experience. I'm sure some people could learn, and did learn, from it. But I'm sure other people found it to be completely offensive. I know of cases that ended up with psychiatric problems because of it. Overdone, it was like anything that was overdone; it didn't work and it caused tremendous resentments. Bill thought this was tremendously important, probably more important than a crisis in the Far East or something. If you were slated to go to sensitivity training, you went to sensitivity training. This kind of thing earned him bad marks elsewhere.

Q: I might say that the sensitivity training was not something created in the Department of State.

BRADFORD: No, but it was one of the modern management tools on the outside that Bill thought was just great, and that we had to have it.

Q: Did you find yourself having any problems at all, being known as "Crockett's hatchet man?"

BRADFORD: Yes, I was one of the hatchet men, but again, I found myself in a spot that I was still young, still very aggressive, and that didn't really bother me a lot that people were out after Bill. This was early on. This was before the sensitivity-training days. I had no problems with what Bill was trying to do at this point. No, that didn't bother me at all.

Q: Did this have any repercussions later on in your career? Sometimes if you are associated with a controversial boss, people have resentments that they carry against those associated with him.

BRADFORD: If they did, it didn't hurt me much and I didn't know about it. There were one or two officers that I didn't get along with then and never did get along with. But I don't think that they ever deliberately hurt me that I know of.

Q: How did Crockett do with the Secretary and Under Secretary?

BRADFORD: In those days, he was tremendously popular with them. He was a very, very hard worker, he knew what he was about, knew his resources. Above all, he had strong rapport on the Hill with some people who were very, very difficult, such as Congressman Rooney, and was able to get the Department pretty well what the Department needed to operate.

Q: This is pointing to something which is basic to the operations of the Department of State. If you have people within the Department of State in a bureau or in one of the major areas, they have to have very good relations in Congress. They have to have some people who might otherwise be hostile. I've seen this in so many cases.

BRADFORD: You're absolutely correct. It's something that we missed for a long, long while, and it is something that was not easy to do. I'm sure many others have made the point that we have no constituency. All we can do is have good relations with Congress, but we can't have, really, any influence in the sense of their constituents are mad about the Basques or something else. We've got to have a policy, and it may not conform to their constituents as people who are subject to a vote. They've got to go with the constituents, whether they love us or not.

Q: Sometimes it is overlooked that we have a Congressional Relations Bureau, but that's only part of it. Each bureau has to have their own ties. I know from coming from the consular bureau, if you've got somebody who's good with Congress, you get what you want within your bureau.

BRADFORD: Right.

Q: I guess Crockett knew how to play this game.

BRADFORD: Mrs. Shepherd. (Laughs)

Q: In 1962, you went to a very interesting assignment as administrative officer in Saigon.

BRADFORD: There is a definite relation between the two. As I say, Bill had a great deal of respect for my management ability. He was taken with the fact that I had come into the Foreign Service as a regular Foreign Service officer, rather than someone from the management side. When Saigon became vacant, they actually nominated three different officers to go there, all of whom refused because of the war. At that point, one night, on the third refusal, I put a note to Bill. The position was two grades above my personal grade at the time. I said, “If nobody else will go, I'd love to go.” So the next day, in Crockett-like fashion, he sent me to Saigon. There was some correspondence with the embassy of why were they sending such a junior officer, and I don't know what the answers were, but the ambassador acquiesced, and I went as the administrative officer to Saigon, a great assignment.

Q: How did you see the situation in Vietnam at the time?

BRADFORD: I think we have to put it in the time frame, which was 1962. I went to the second counterinsurgency class. We were addressed by Bobby Kennedy, who explained to us that we knew all the things the French didn't know, and we would have no trouble winning this war. All we had to do was study the people and all of these good things. By and large, most of us thought we could do it. There wasn't any great doubt about Vietnam at the time.

Q: This was before the great protests in the United States.

BRADFORD: Absolutely.

Q: Really before the military buildup, too.

BRADFORD: It kept increasing when I was there. I was on leave when the Gulf of Tonkin occurred, and then we started the really big buildup. That was about the time I departed.

Q: When you got into Saigon, how did you find the operation of the embassy at that time?

BRADFORD: Actually, the operation of the embassy at that particular point, in the widest terms, was excellent. We had a very, very find ambassador, Fritz Nolting. He was the ambassador, he was in charge of things, he delegated well. The American military were not running the country in any real sense of the word; he was running it. The embassy itself, from the management standpoint, I think there were some improvements to be made. It was too divided. This is one that I pushed throughout the Crockett era, and even later, was that I felt that management was a tool of the ambassador, and, therefore, a single administrative section was always desirable. We worked towards that and made a great deal of strides. We were taking in part of the military, which was much smaller in those days, for a good many administrative responsibilities and taking in most of the AID responsibilities.

Q: How did this work? There must have been a lot of opposition.

BRADFORD: There was. I found that initially, you could get over most of this opposition by increasing services. We found, at that time, there were certain things the State Department people got administratively that AID people didn't get. Conversely, there were certain things that AID people got, which State Department people didn't get, whether it was the number of air-conditioners per house, or who got a stepladder and who got garbage cans, and so forth. By pushing everything up to the highest common denominator, if AID got stepladders and we got garbage cans, I gave garbage cans to everybody and stepladders to everybody. This increase in services made it palatable, at least for a while. There are built-in problems in it, problems of prerogatives of the AID chief, who, when he has his own AID section, is top man. If he's part of an embassy section, he may be second or third man. They're human and don't care for that.The big problem in this, a problem that was never completely resolved, is what do you do about the personnel? The State Department people say the AID administrative staff is over-graded. Therefore, if you fold them in,

it's unfair to fold them in. There's no way to put them together and cut out people's jobs, unless you take the people in. This was one of the biggest problems.

Q: Were you able to get anywhere with this?

BRADFORD: I think later on, when we come to the African time, we were able to get someplace. I didn't get very far in Saigon, but as I say, we had an excellent ambassador who believed in controlling these things. It was to his advantage, and therefore, he gave me a great deal of support, and we were able to get some of the things done, despite opposition of the staff and the AID director.

Q: How did the events of this period reflect on your work? Were you were there in November of 1963?

BRADFORD: Yes, I was there in '63.

Q: This is when Diem was killed.

BRADFORD: Yes, I was there when Diem was killed.

Q: Lodge had taken over by then. From your point of view, could you compare and contrast Lodge, as far as dealing with the administrative work?

BRADFORD: Yes. I have to be careful of this, because dealing with any work was beneath Henry Cabot Lodge. He didn't like to work. (Laughs)

Q: He had that reputation.

BRADFORD: Therefore, administration was something that, “Just please don't bother me with any of that nonsense.” I have two or three favorite Lodge stories. One is when he got there, the first thing he did administratively was to have the ambassadorial plate taken off his door and replaced by one that said “Mr. Lodge,” because that meant more.

That's enough. I did not like Mr. Lodge particularly, nor did I think he was a very good ambassador.

Q: How did this reflect, though? We are looking from a historical and operational point of view. What did this do to you? Did you find that you no longer had the clout to work because he didn't pay attention? Or did somebody else help?

BRADFORD: We had two very good DCMs who were career men, both of whom got hurt by the situation, but both of whom were willing to take the brunt of the punishment and let things go on. It didn't affect administration much, as such, because he was uninterested in it. Therefore, things that had been set as a pattern went on pretty well as that pattern, except for one small field, which was the ambassador and how he was treated. He got so much more and demanded so much more than anybody else, it was difficult.

Q: How about the Vietnamese staff that you had there?

BRADFORD: They were excellent, just incredible. They learned so rapidly, they were so able. One story that I like to recount is that I was there at this time, and then I went back 11 years later. When I was there, we had an emergency generator in the embassy, and to put it in, we had to fly in Filipino help, because the Vietnamese didn't know anything about generators, hadn't had occasion to learn. When I was back 11 years later and was at the embassy, there was a section in the embassy that rebuilt generators, not only for Saigon, but for all the Far East. They were the finest generator workmen in the world, and there was only one expatriate there, and he was only there part-time. In these 11 years, they had learned so much, it was incredible.

Q: There was a rather bad bomb blast. Were you there then?

BRADFORD: No, I was not there at the time of the bombing of the embassy. That was a little after I left.

Q: How did the officers that you were dealing with feel about the events, particularly of November '63, and the overthrow and killing of Diem, his brother, then the coup and the beginning of the rotational governments in Saigon? Did that have any effect on you?

BRADFORD: It made me feel like a great prophet, because I sent the ambassador a paper the next morning, saying this was one of the greatest defeats of American foreign policy in history, and that we would now go through a series of military governments. I think we were all disappointed. We had been disappointed in Diem, but nevertheless, there was a case to be made for Diem and for his government. It was one we had supported for several years, in fact, and thought, maybe falsely, that we were making some progress. I think we all thought that if we were going to get into a military situation, where the military kept changing governments, we were going to be in a very fragile situation that we couldn't do much with.

Q: This is an important time. There was not a sense of exaltation, of, "Now we've gotten rid of this guy. Now let's really get to work." I'm talking about the officer corps of the embassy.

BRADFORD: I'm sure that there were a handful that had been caught up in the Buddhist thing and thought, "This is great. Now we're rid of him," particular the brother and Madame Nhu. By and large, though, I think it was sort of, "This is the situation we face. Where do we go from here?" Neither tremendous depression, although there was some, or elation.

Q: The administrative section often has to deal more with the workings of the government where they're attached than any other one. Did you find any difference? How was it during and after the Diem rule?

BRADFORD: It was more difficult after Diem, because no one knew who was in charge, where they stood, or what their authority was. Under Diem, people were well entrenched, the customs people knew what they could and couldn't do, and so on throughout the government. Afterwards, it was much more difficult. Everybody felt they had to get a

clearance from somebody, and it ended up with some general who was either too busy or who didn't know which way to go.

Q: You mentioned that three people of American staff had turned down the job you had before you went there. I can recall in 1969, I was at a reception to meet the new head of the administrative section, and he was supposed to fly in that day. Halfway through the reception, they said he got off the plane, took one look, turned around, and left.

BRADFORD: I know. (Laughs)

Q: Were you having trouble getting competent American staff?

BRADFORD: I think, actually, during the time I was there, this changed. Originally, yes, they were having a lot of problems getting people to go to Vietnam. It was not on the front page of the American papers. It was a place where a war was going on, a lot of shooting going on, and one wondered, “What kind of diplomacy can you conduct in this kind of a war atmosphere?” During the time I was there, I mentioned that the Kennedys got very strongly on board in counterinsurgency, here was a war we were going to win, and it became clear that career-wise, this was a way to get ahead. Sharp, young officers, therefore, decided they wanted to go to Vietnam, rather than not wanting to go to Vietnam.

It was also during the days that you took your family to Vietnam. I had my wife and three children. My father died while I was there, so my mother joined us. My grandmother had lived with us, so my grandmother joined us. So we had four generations of family out there.

Q: So you felt that you were getting a good staff?

BRADFORD: Oh, yes.

Q: How about after our commitment towards Diem? Was there a change?

BRADFORD: Actually, I was there so briefly after the buildup started, that I couldn't really comment on it. The kind of officers that went out were officers who later did very, very well career-wise, so I can't see that they suffered. I think there was a change in the nature of the staff, in that with the buildup, there was suddenly this tremendous upgrading of jobs in the embassy. Jobs that had been held by 03s were all 01s. After all, we had an ambassador and deputy ambassador in those days, unheard of in that situation. In my own job, I was replaced by a very experienced admin man, a good admin man. He came out, and we went over my work for two days, and he said, “You're just the administrative officer.” I said, “That's right. That's what my job is.” “I don't want to do that. I did that years ago.” So I was an 03 at the time, he got an 03 to come out as his deputy, who replaced me. So we had an extra 01 on hand.

Q: You moved from trouble spots. You left Saigon, and then you went to the Congo. It was Congo then, Leopoldville, then it became Zaire.

BRADFORD: While I was there it became Zaire and Kinshasa.

Q: This was 1964. How did this assignment come about?

BRADFORD: Actually, I would have loved to stay on in Saigon, but things were upgraded so, I was obviously no longer going to be in charge. So they asked me to go to another trouble spot, which was the Congo, or Zaire. It was a trouble spot not only because there was a war going on there, and I was used to dealing in this kind of a situation, but because it was one of the first big test cases for trying to put an administrative section completely together. There was to be one administrative section which was to run all US Government agencies in the Congo, which were rather extensive in those days.

Q: What was the situation in the Congo when you arrived?

BRADFORD: In the Congo, we talked a great deal about the hostages in Beirut. There were actually a group of hostages being held in what was then Stanleyville, who were all

Foreign Service officers who had been captured by the Simba rebels. A good deal of the country was under the control of these Simba rebels, who were, in a way, reminiscent of the Iranians. They were fanatics. It was not really a political movement as much as it was a tribal fanatic situation. Our hostages had been held for three or four months when I got there, I think. There were other hostages, several missionaries, one of whom was later killed. It was very chaotic. We were involved in assisting the government in the war against these rebels. One point I'd like to make is that I think it was done very, very well, nearly all by the CIA, but it's a war we won. We set out to defeat these rebels and support the central government. The rebels were defeated, the central government went on. There were coups within the central government, but never any overthrow by these various elements. That there wasn't, was largely because of our support of a mercenary force, our supplying that mercenary force, which won the war for the central government.

Q: Did you get involved in this supply operation?

BRADFORD: Only peripherally. I knew of its existence, but it was pretty well handled by the CIA.

Q: This essentially was an experiment, wasn't it?

BRADFORD: It was an experiment.

Q: This was called CAMO.

BRADFORD: CAMO—Consolidated Administrative Management Organization. We put together a very successful CAMO in Zaire, which served all of the agencies there. It served what military we had there, it served the agency and all of its overt activities, it served all of AID, which was a very large operation, USIA, and ourselves.

Q: Was there resistance to this?

BRADFORD: It had pretty well been established in Washington, where Bill Crockett was still in power, that this would be done. So resistance was there, but there wasn't much they could do about it. In addition, I took on, as my deputies, some of the AID officers that would otherwise be unemployed. It worked quite satisfactorily.

Q: While you were there, the ambassador was Max Godley. Can you describe, from your point of view, his style of operation and how you felt about him?

BRADFORD: He was very flamboyant, very likable, didn't want to be bothered with administrative details, but would support me completely in it, recognized that that was his role. He was a great man to work for in the capacity I was in. The people in the message center loved him. He had a refrigerator full of beer. There was only one thing: the last bottle had a tag on it, which said “Max.” They could drink all the beer they wanted, as long as they didn't drink Max's last beer. (Laughs)He was a great man to work with. Now, if you had a policy dispute with him, that was different. Then he tended to be arbitrary. Some of the people from HE, whom I knew very well, the USIA chief, who originally was an old wartime buddy of Max's, they got along fine, but the man that replaced him, they didn't get along at all.

Q: He gave the proper support on the administrative side.

BRADFORD: Right. He didn't want to be bothered with it, but he knew that if I had a problem, that he should support me in order to get the thing under control.

Q: How well was our aid mission managed, do you think? What was it trying to do?

BRADFORD: Let's put it this way. I'm a man who basically likes most of the aid people and dislikes the aid program completely. I have never seen an aid program that I thought it was doing anything.

Q: Could you give some examples of why you felt this way?

BRADFORD: Actually, I'd like to go a little later in my career when I was responsible for the aid program in Chad. This was after everybody in the world had become aware of the problem in the Sahel Desert. It's the southern reaches of the Sahara Desert. The desert is creeping south, it is being overgrazed, which helps the desertification. People were starving to death. It had been bad rain years, and everybody was in there saying, “We've got to help these people. We've go to do something about the Sahel.”

When I got there, there was an aid program on the books to give the Chadians something like $23 million the following year, in 1976. There was no way the Chadians could use $23 million in any intelligent fashion, nor did our plan provide for any way for them to use it. It was just a figure that somebody had gone to Congress with and said, “Let's give them $23 million.”

We had a very widespread little, inefficient programs. Some were agriculture. Nearly all of them were well intentioned, but they weren't doing anything, nor were they really addressing any of the problems of the Sahel. We had a tree project, which is a fine idea, to put trees along the southern edge of the desert. But in total, it would cover maybe two miles of an area that needed 1,500 miles of trees. There was no provision of where it would go from there. Somebody just sort of hoped that it would all work out.

But the biggest thing I found was that between 80% and 90% of our costs were costs for American personnel. They had conferences, they had tremendous staff requirements, and I didn't think we were really going to do anything about the problem by spending that kind of money for American people to go into an area that they were unfamiliar with.

Q: Moving back to Zaire, did you find the same thing happening?

BRADFORD: I did.

Q: A tremendous overhead for American personnel?

BRADFORD: Absolutely. There were far more people than the rest of the program, it seemed to me. It was a constantly growing figure. There was always a request for another six for this and another four for this.

Q: This seems to be endemic, particularly to that type of operation. You look at the State Department-Foreign Service, which has remained almost static now since we both came in, in the 1950s, around 3,500 officers. As an ambassador looking at it, or as an administrative officer looking at it, is there any way to control this growth?

BRADFORD: As an ambassador, there is a way to control it. It's a very arbitrary way. You say, “You can't have any more.” Ambassador Briggs did that in Greece many, many years ago. In fact, he did it the other way around. He said, “Send a third of them away. I don't care which third you send, but send a third of them away and don't bring in any more.” In my little bailiwick in Chad, I took a very similar view. I was completely negative to any requests for an increase. If they brought it to me six or seven times, and each time tried to make a case, eventually I might say, “Okay, I think maybe you do need this person.” But it tended to hold it down, because they knew I just wasn't going to buy it.

They then started around with the temporary duty, that if I wouldn't approve any personnel on a regular basis, they would send in six people to stay forever on temporary duty. You, again, could get a handle on that, probably not until it occurs, but say, “No, I don't want anybody on temporary duty. Don't bring anybody.”

Q: How did you find dealing with the government? Was Mobutu chief of state?

BRADFORD: When I got there, Kasavubu was the chief of staff, then Tshombe became prime minister, and then he was overthrown by Mobutu. In all honesty, we had very little dealings with the Congolese, except a handful at customs. We were in the position in those days, in the Congo, of largely running our own operation, which was supporting the government. Therefore, we didn't have to worry too much about what the government

said. This wasn't true in the political field or military, probably, but on the management side, I just didn't have any of the normal headaches you would have in dealing with a host government.

Q: Administratively, it was a little bit colonialistic, wasn't it?

BRADFORD: Absolutely.

Q: We just said, "You can't handle it. We'll do it."

BRADFORD: That's right.

Q: You brought your own people in, so the normal services were done by the American staff.

BRADFORD: Yes. As I alluded before, the war was fought by outsiders.

Q: Did you use many local Congolese employees?

BRADFORD: Honestly, very few, except in jobs like chauffeurs and laborers. Most of what was called the local staff tended to be ex-colonials themselves—Belgians, a few Brits.

Q: Was the safety of American personnel a major concern of yours?

BRADFORD: No, it never assumed the proportions while I was there that it had in Vietnam. There were incidents of armed robbery, there was a great deal of petty theft, but as far as real danger of an American being killed, outside of those who were being held by the Simbas, who were later freed and went to Belgian parishes, there wasn't any.

Q: How about corruption? You must have been in a position where this became a problem, the selling of America, the selling of your equipment.

BRADFORD: Oh, yes.

Q: Getting things through customs. Any time you ran across the Congolese authorities, it must have been a problem.

BRADFORD: I don't think it was quite as big a problem then as it has become. It's endemic in Africa of what we consider to be corruption, which is that you pay people for illegal services. This is before the Anti-Corruption Act later. I was not averse to paying pay people for those services if it made them run better. So, in effect, we tipped people at customs. We had no particular problems with tremendous takes. In addition, we had the fall-back position that we really ran the place, and if they really gave us too many headaches, we could pretty well go right to the top and say, “Take care of this.”

Q: You raised a point that's important for someone reading this transcript to consider. Sometimes corruption is in the eye of the beholder. I've found this true in Vietnam and other places. There's a long tradition of what you might call a pay-off, but actually it's the way a government runs sometimes. In other words, if you want a policeman to protect you, you pay the policeman a bit of money, or a customs man, to perform a service. He or she is not paid much, and they're expected to pick up some money for this. In a way, although the fees aren't defined, it's an actual way of a government having services performed.

BRADFORD: As you say, while the fees aren't defined, they're reasonably well established. When I was in Saigon, most of the business there was done with the Chinese community. The Vietnamese were not businessmen. The Chinese businessmen controlled most real estate and most of the businesses. The Chinese businessmen considered a 3% fee was automatically included in everything for the recipient of the business. They always set aside 3% for me. Needless to say, I couldn't accept the 3% and wouldn't accept the 3%, but it gave them a terrible problem. I later became good friends with them. They had no idea what to do with the 3%. If they kept it themselves, then they had charged too much for the service, and this wasn't good. If they started not including it, then they couldn't

justify a comparative price for somebody else that wanted it. They had a terrible problem with this.

Fees in Africa are locally just about as well described. There's a certain amount you pay in D_____ to get something cleared through customs, and there's a certain amount you pay in _____ to get something through customs. Somebody that wants to charge you two or three times as much, that's very easy to solve. You take it to your supervisor and say, “He's charging three times as much.” And he says, “I won't have that.”

Q: This is where it pays to know the service. Really, it's more of a cultural thing than a matter of corruption versus non-corruption.

BRADFORD: My view of it completely is that there's a complete difference in the cultural view. I think it is incredible that we have the audacity to go up and tell them they're all wrong, that they have to do it our way.

I have a friend who was a minister in Lagos. He comes from the northern part of the country, had the very great responsibility family-wise and village-wise. His responsibility included sponsoring something in the neighborhood of 40 children abroad in universities. He was financially responsible for them. His salary at that time was about $8,000 a year. Obviously, Nigerian society expected him to support these children, but does not expect him on $8,000 a year to be able to pay for them. They expect him to get money somewhere else, which he did. I can go out and say, “You're all wrong.”

Q: From Leopoldville, we're moving to your next assignment, again in Africa. You went to Freetown in Sierra Leone as deputy chief of mission from 1966 to 1968. How did this assignment come about?

BRADFORD: That I can't even answer. That came out of Washington. They said, “You've done well in administration. We'd like you to be the DCM in Sierra Leone,” which for me was a step forward and was fine. I enjoyed it and liked it.

Q: What was our role and interests in Sierra Leone?

BRADFORD: I would have to go back to President Kennedy, who decided we would have an embassy in every African country. We had almost no real interest in Sierra Leone. It's a lovely little place with great people, although they did manage, while we were there, to put on a rather Gilbert and Sullivan type of coup. They had a democratic system when I arrived. They had an election. The opposition apparently won, or tied, in the election. The question really hinged on certain traditional chiefs who also joined in the process of going to Parliament. This paralyzed the government, at which point the general in charge of the Army took over everything and said, “We can't have this kind of paralysis.” He don't like the opposition, he didn't try and reimpose the other government, but he took over. He lasted three days, at which point the officer corps took over from the general. The officer corps lasted considerably longer, about ten months, at which time they were overthrown by the non-commissioned officers who tried running the government for about three days, and they were overthrown by a mutiny of the privates. At this point, the privates proved to be the smartest of all. They ran the government for one day and said, “We can't run this government,” and they called back the opposition. So we had, in all of this, a series of seven different coups, in which nobody got hurt. The Sierra Leoneans are all related to each other, and it's very bad form to hurt anybody. So you don't shoot anybody.

Q: It didn't happen as in Liberia, where the tension was so terrible.

BRADFORD: No. That existed in Sierra Leone, but had never quite reached that proportion. At no point were they really against what was called the Creoles, the slaves.

Q: You had two ambassadors while you were there.

BRADFORD: I had two ambassadors, and I was fortunate in both, but even more fortunate that there was well over a year gap between the two. So I was actually in charge for most of my tour there.

Q: What did you do?

BRADFORD: We did the traditional things of the Foreign Service, but we did them in a country where they weren't terribly important. We reported on the political situation, on all the coups and counter-coups and rumors of what was going on. We reported on the economic situation of the country, which, except for the diamond industry which kept it going, was uniformly bad. But there was enough money in diamonds to keep things going. We were very close to the diamond people and knew what was going on in the diamond fields. We did the traditional consular functions, issued visas to people who wanted to go, and took care of Americans. I don't think we ever issued a passport; I don't think that ever came up while I was there. It's a very small place. We had a cultural affairs program in which we worked particularly with the students. The administrative section ran the operation. We had an aid program, and above all, we had a Peace Corps program, which was very active and very large, with almost 300 volunteers. This was an ideal country for Peace Corps operation. Even with all these changes in government, they were in no danger. It was English speaking, so you had no language problems. We had volunteers all over the country doing all kinds of things.

Q: How effective did you find the Peace Corps, looking back on it?

BRADFORD: I have always thought that it was tremendously effective, but the greatest effect of all was on the volunteers themselves. As far as the programs they conducted, it's going to take another ten or 20 years to look back and say, “Were they successful?” Physically, no, they weren't successful. I know they started growing Sierra Leone upland rice and did a beautiful job, it looked great. The minute the volunteers left, it disappeared. There was no lasting impact. The fact that upland rice was grown and these people saw it grown may, indeed, have an effect for the future. I'm not sure. But to the volunteer himself, they gained tremendously. Their knowledge of the world and their understanding of it was something wonderful.

Q: This is very true. Did you have any black Americans coming back to Sierra Leone, looking for their roots and trying to settle?

BRADFORD: No, this was before “Roots” occurred. No, we didn't have any.

Q: In 1968, you came back and went to the Senior Seminar. Then in 1969 through 1975, you were the Executive Director of African Affairs in the Department. This is a rather key position in any geographic bureau. Could you explain what you did?

BRADFORD: Basically, I would say I was the senior manager for African affairs, both in Washington at the Bureau of African Affairs, and in a supervisory capacity for all the posts in Africa. This means supervision of personnel, assignments and transfers, money, budgetary requests, justification, security, communications, and physical operations covered by the general service buildings, motor pools, and so forth. It was a job I very much wanted, having the administrative background, but I wanted to try that job, and I particularly wanted to try it in Africa.

Q: From your position, what did you consider the most important thing you had to focus on?

BRADFORD: In the Foreign Service, it's always people. This was so much more important. Money is important, but not at all like people. Focusing on people means taking care of them in the physical sense of what they get, medical facilities and so forth, but above all, taking care of their morale, that they have some place that they think they're going, that they're not on a dead end in Africa. This we were able to do. Actually, a quirk of circumstances. In those days, when I first took over, the bureau had a great deal more say in assignments than it did later. It was not as centralized. Therefore, we were able to keep people moving through Africa, moving them up, moving them to better posts, rather than dead-ending them.

Q: You really had more of a feeling in Africa than in other places, that you didn't really have to worry about the collision of political appointees taking jobs very much.

BRADFORD: This was correct. We had very few political appointees, although I have never thought that was a terrible problem. Even when we start talking percentages, we're talking small amounts. And when we did have political appointees, we had some bad ones and some good ones. I'm particularly reminded of people who felt we had this terrible problem coming up, and they were going to send Shirley Temple to Ghana. This was going to be terrible. Shirley Temple turned out to be one of the best ambassadors we've ever had. She was a magnificent, very intelligent woman, she took a very strong DCM, and she said, “You know the traditional business. You do that. I'll do the outside PR business.” She was tremendous, much smarter than people give her credit for.

Q: Just to look at some of the old pictures, one can see that no three- or four-year-old kid can do what she did without being smart as hell.

BRADFORD: Yes.

Q: There's a conflict that goes on within the State Department personnel. One is that the geographic bureau should have all the power, and the other argument is that it should be centralized. Part of the problem is that you get some bureaus, particularly something like the European Bureau, which keeps all its people together, and it doesn't allow breathing space for people coming out of Central America or from Africa to have a European post, rather than a small and sometimes more challenging work in the Middle East or somewhere else.

BRADFORD: As long as I am no longer running AF, I think from the Service standpoint, the central system is a much better idea. I don't think we can run an overall Service and let each geographic bureau have the authority we had in Africa. It was too much for the system. Our people were doing very well. Some other people weren't doing very well. This

reflected throughout in things like promotions. We were able to move our people in more responsible jobs. Grade-wise, we could see that they were rewarded. It worked unfairly for the overall service, but it worked great for Africa.

Q: One does have that impression. Who was in charge of African affairs while you were there?

BRADFORD: Most of the time I was there, Dave Newsom was the assistant secretary. Again, I was very lucky. He's a fine man. I was one of a few executive directors that was treated actually as a deputy assistant secretary. He met daily with his three deputy assistant secretaries, and with myself, and I was in charge of managing the bureau and the field, and that was it. I did not report to any of the deputies; I reported to him. He did not mess with that thing much, but he was interested in it. Dave Newsom was interested. He was a very good witness when he had to go up and defend the budget and so forth, and he took the time to prepare himself.

Q: This was the Nixon years and more the Rogers years. How much interest did you feel the administration had, as far as it reflected on your operations?

BRADFORD: The administration had very little interest in how the overall State Department was run. There was this traditional feeling that the State Department was really not tremendously trustworthy, anyway, and that, therefore, short leash was better. From the African standpoint, we, again, had a lucky coincidence of circumstances, in that we were able to operate much more independently and without problems than some of the others. We had a traditional budget base that came on very late in the game. Therefore, we had things that weren't wearing out and weren't getting too old, and yet we had the same replacement cycle as everybody else. We had a budget base that had been based on building posts out of nothing, and therefore, we had in the budget items for air-conditioners, for furniture, that a lot of European posts couldn't have. People had always taken their furniture there. Therefore, even in the worst budget years, we were better off

from a budgetary standpoint. I had a couple of geniuses that ran my budget, and I was never in the position of defending them. I left them pretty well to prepare. We did very, very well.

Q: This is one of the key places to have someone who is both creative and knows how to deal with figures, in a geographic bureau. Did you have any problems getting personnel to go to Africa?

BRADFORD: Yes, we did. We had really almost no problem with bright, young officers, because if it was the way to get ahead for a bright, young officer, he could get a job and be two grades above what he should have been. So we had a lot of bright, young officers to go out. But for middle-grade officers who were responsible, we had trouble finding jobs that were responsible enough for them to be really interested. Plus, by that time they began to have children, high-school children, and we had school problems and so forth. So our problem was finding middle-grade officers. We had a very limited demand for senior officers; there were only a handful of senior-officer posts, short of the ambassador.

Q: Looking back on it, you had a fairly good period of time there. What do you feel was your main accomplishment during that period of time?

BRADFORD: We made tremendous progress in those days in the field of consolidating manpower. We were able to take aboard several senior aid officers, which took care of part of the problem I alluded to, of what to do with the people you replace. We established several dozen CAMOs which worked quite well. We took over part of the functions of AID in Washington, their African functions, into the bureau. We ran a difficult continent, and morale was generally very high in the bureau. But we went on with some of the things I mentioned earlier under Bill Crockett, delegating authority to the posts to do more on their own, with less reference to Washington.

I established, myself, a tradition that I'm very happy to say has gone on. I visited every post in Africa when I was there. I traveled probably two to three months a year. Therefore,

we were able to have a very personal relationship with the administrative officers in the field and with the ambassadors in the field. We were able to shortstop a lot of problems that otherwise would have festered. That was probably what I did the best.

Q: In 1976, you left as Director of African Affairs and became involved once again in Vietnam. What happened?

BRADFORD: Actually, I became involved in what they call in the State Department, walking the corridors. I had left the job as Executive Director, being appointed ambassador to an African country. We changed Secretary of State at that time, and all the ambassadorial appointments were stopped, and I was left somewhat hanging.

Q: This is when Henry Kissinger came in.

BRADFORD: Right. I was supposed to go to Mauritius, which I knew and loved and was looking forward to, but when Kissinger came in, he wanted to take a look at all of it, which is the Secretary's privilege, he made a lot of changes, and I was left unemployed. I did a few odd jobs for various bureaus on the management side—the U.N. and its organization, on the American side, the American mission, and a couple of other things like that. Then there was an inspection team put together to go to Vietnam. By then, the public outcry over Vietnam was in high gear. There were all kinds of operating problems in Vietnam that they wanted looked at. There had not been an inspection for some five or six years, and Congress was demanding that one be made.

Q: When was this?

BRADFORD: We actually arrived in Saigon in January of 1975. It was a six-man team, an inspection that ran up until April, a very long inspection and very detailed. I was in charge of the management side of it. In that, we traveled all over Vietnam, and it was fascinating to go back after an 11-year hiatus, and see the changes.

Q: Just to get the timing right, when did the last helicopters leave?

BRADFORD: April.

Q: So wasn't this a little bit like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?

BRADFORD: In some sense. In fact, in most senses it was, because as you started arranging the chairs, you had no idea the ship was going to sink. In fact, if you would talk to the captain, he would say, “Everything is in great shape. We're breaking the record. We have the safest ship in the world.” This was Vietnam up to the very end. On the surface, and maybe even below the surface, but from our standpoint as an inspection team, what we were told seemed to be true. We seemed to be doing very well in Vietnam. The Vietnamese troops were fighting much better than they had when I was there. We got outside of Can Tho and some of the places where the actual battles were going on, and they were acquitting themselves very, very well, and doing it without a lot of Americans around. Throughout, there was a feeling of optimism. That was until somebody pulled the cork and the whole thing went down the tube. I will leave to others who are more acquainted with military history what actually happened. But it happened very rapidly. There was, to my knowledge, no one there predicting this kind of thing would happen. It seems to have been like so many military battles, a series of flukes, then the whole house of cards came down.

Q: At that point, we had quite a few posts.

BRADFORD: Yes, we did.

Q: Were they looking over their shoulder and saying, “Oh, my God, here it comes”?

BRADFORD: No way. No way. Most of them were very confident in what was going on. There was responsibility, and there were officers around who said, “This is all a terrible mistake,” and so forth, but I never heard anybody approach me, or anybody on the team,

with, “Oh, this is a mistake and it's going to fall apart next month or two months from now,” and so forth. There was some sort of slop-over from what was happening in the States into the attitude of some people, but by and large, when they looked at the job that was being done on the ground by Americans and Vietnamese, they were all optimistic.

Q: They would be more inclined to speak their minds to you, because an inspection allows you to get things off your chest that you wouldn't be able to do in a stratified reporting situation.

BRADFORD: Yes, I would think so. Incidentally, I've heard some of these officers since that time tell me how they knew it all along. I won't argue over the point, but they never mentioned it to me. This is true with those who served way back with me earlier.

Q: This is the end of this enterprise, but we are creating a historical record. What did you see as the major problems from the inspection team's point of view of our operation in Vietnam at this final term?

BRADFORD: Operating problems, there were only a handful, and they were not in any sense major. We had a very strong personality as ambassador.

Q: This was Graham Martin.

BRADFORD: Yes. He had filled some jobs improperly. He had filled the administrative / consular job improperly. He filled it with a very fine officer, but one who had absolutely no experience in this field at all—none. He had struck out, and then the ambassador had gotten rid of him very perfunctorily. So you had a period of a man who didn't really quite know what the whole thing was doing, and then you had a gap. In running an operation of that size, you can't afford that kind of a gap. Things come unstuck.

We had one very interesting thing, which dated back to my days in Saigon. When I was there, the military all had their own clubs. We had a great number of civilian contractors in

the country building communication facilities and other things. They had no place to go. They were not admitted to the military clubs, and they could go to Vietnamese bars, but there were no clubs of their own. They had had one, but through mismanagement, it had gone bankrupt and was sitting there empty.

Q: This was the embassy club, wasn't it?

BRADFORD: I made it the embassy club. I took it over and put it together and made it the embassy club, then called the Cocoa Club. One of my first experiences as the operator of a gambling facility as opposed to a patron of a gambling facility, we put in slot machines. We started making money hand over fist. I never knew how much money slot machines made; I knew how much they took away. But we were suddenly rolling in money. We kept expanding this club and adding new operations to it. I left, and it grew and it grew and it grew.

So by the time I went back 11 years later, the club was in the middle of the compound, with a very large restaurant and all kinds of meeting rooms, a swimming pool, and so forth, and had a bank balance well in excess of $1 million, which was far more than Saigon could ever use. One of the things I was there for was to try and figure out how legally we could somehow transfer the million dollars to other recreational facilities around the world and share in it.

My big problem was that the ambassador didn't want to transfer the money. I don't know what he was going to do with $1 million, but as far as he was concerned, it was there, and they were going to keep it. (Laughs)

Q: How did you see the operating style and personality of Graham Martin at this juncture?

BRADFORD: I saw him from a very limited standpoint, and he was actually away from the post nearly all the time we were there. This was a very critical juncture with Congress, because they were trying to get a supplemental appropriation for more ammunition and

more gasoline for the Vietnamese Army. He was handling that in Washington, so he was not at the post a great deal of the time I was there.

Of his style, what little I saw of it—a man I did not know well before and have no real knowledge of—I heard a lot of good things about him, and he was a very personal operator. He wanted people he knew throughout this organization. These people were not always the most qualified people for it, but he felt easy with them and trusted them. I think that somewhat reflected on the overall operation.

Q: How did you leave?

BRADFORD: I stayed on a little after the rest of the team. I was trying to put together a new system that would equate jobs and resources with the tasks being done. I had a statistical charge, but it wouldn't have worked even if the place hadn't fallen, I don't think. It's one idea I had. The rest of the team left, and I stayed on. I was there when they started fleeing from up north, when the troops started grabbing our landing gear and so forth. Actually, I had a reservation to leave at that time, and I deferred to the embassy. We decided there wasn't a hell of a lot of point in me finishing the inspection under these circumstances. They really don't want old-timers around under these circumstances, and there wasn't anything for me to do, so I got on an airplane to leave. So I left maybe a week before.

Q: At that point, was the embassy and the people you were talking to, beginning to reflect the . . .

BRADFORD: When the troops north of Hue bolted, those were the best troops in Vietnam. At that point, they knew they had a terrible problem.

Q: What was the feeling? Were they saying, “Let's get out of here”?

BRADFORD: They were all talking about getting out and evacuation.

Q: How about back in Washington? Was the feeling reflected there?

BRADFORD: By the time I got here, a couple of days later, the evacuation was actually taking place.

Q: Finally, after your abortive ambassadorship to Mauritius, you were appointed ambassador to Chad just about after you got back.

BRADFORD: Shortly thereafter.

Q: Was this a routine assignment?

BRADFORD: It was routine in the sense of the Foreign Service, but it was also, I think, routine in the sense of knowledge of our own system, because I had been called the day before and told that there wasn't any ambassadorship in the cards, that I might just as well forget that, that it just wasn't going to work. The next day, the same man called me and said, “I'm sorry, but I'm wrong. We just heard from the White House that you're to go to Chad.” (Laughs) I hadn't even fought for Chad.

Q: This was 1976. What were American interests in Chad?

BRADFORD: Again, like Sierra Leone, there weren't any interests in Chad. Chad was a place in the middle of Africa, it was before we got very concerned about Colonel Qadhafi and his interests in Chad.

Q: Colonel Qadhafi is the head of Libya.

BRADFORD: Right. It's on the northern border of Chad. They seized a contested piece on the border called the Aozou Strip, and still holds it, and was supporting various rebel groups trying to overthrow the central government. But it was not a matter of great interest to us. It was part of the Sahel, and we were interested in the problem I alluded to before,

of the desert creeping south and the great threat. But these were about the only American concerns.

Q: Did you have any instructions from Washington when you went there?

BRADFORD: No, none. There was a monumental disinterest in Chad or what happened in Chad, which made it a wonderful post to be the ambassador in, because you could really be an ambassador. You could throw yourself almost back a century and do what you thought was proper, because nobody really much cared.

Q: How did you find the staff at the embassy when you got there?

BRADFORD: The embassy staff was A-1, very, very small. Besides myself, there was a DCM, one junior officer, an administrative officer, a political officer, and that was the officer staff. There were two secretaries, three communicators, and then a rather large aid mission of 40 people. There was a Peace Corps of about 200 to 250. The military attach# and one non-commissioned officer, a cultural affairs officer, and that was about the total staff.

Q: Did you find that they gave you good support?

BRADFORD: Absolutely. By and large, it was a good staff.

Q: Who was your DCM?

BRADFORD: My DCM at that time was Dick Dwyer, who was later shot in the Jonestown business in Guyana. A first-rate officer. I had inherited him from my predecessor. He and my predecessor had obviously not gotten along. Dick and I just got along great. He was a first-rate officer. The rest of my staff, there were two junior officers when I was there, both of whom were very good. I had two administrative officers, and both suffered from having an ambassador who had been an administrative officer. I tried to stay out of their business, but probably unsuccessfully. My cultural affairs officer was absolutely first-rate,

moved on from there to be the DCM and charg# in Mauritania, and did justifiably very well in the Service. With my aid chief, who was a first-rate technician, I had the problems that I mentioned before. We had this huge program and grandiose ideas which I did not think were appropriate, and we got along well on a personal level, but on a professional level, it was a constant battle.

Q: Could you describe the government, or governments, when you were there? What was the political situation?

BRADFORD: When I was there, there had been a military coup about three years before, and there was a military government, ministers, a president, all military officers, all of whom their background came from the southern part of the country, being the black portion of the country, the northern part being the Arab portion of the country. Like Sudan, it is divided right across the middle, and several other African countries have the same problem. It was a tremendously deep problem, one that was just not going to go away overnight.

Historically, the northern portions of these countries dominated the southern part. The southern part was slaves, was inferior to them, and the northerners still feel this way.

When the French and the English came into the area, they tended to find the fringe of the desert more inhabitable, and therefore, they lived there and educated the people around them through missionaries and other means. Therefore, the blacks have better education than the Arab portion. The blacks have better health and have much higher birth rates. Therefore, any time you go to a “democratic” system, the blacks tend to win and basically outvote the Arabs. This does not sit well with the Arabs at all. They think it is a natural thing that they should be the rulers.In addition to which, in a very short time with this deep division, the south tends to start taking advantage of the situation, seldom by any kind of outright persecution. The blacks tend to take advantage of a situation when they win an election, and it's not by persecution of the northerners, but by small things. For instance, in

Chad, the government passed a tax on cattle. You had to pay so much for every head of cattle. That applied throughout the country. Only one problem: the cattle are in the north. So the northerners ended up paying all the taxes, and the southerners didn't have to pay much. Actually, this one tax started a revolution in the country, and several armies rose up in the northern part of the country to contest with the government for control of the little country. These armies—and there tended to be several—as a matter of fact, by the time I was there, there were 11 different armies, each with its own leader, each with its own views on how things should occur. They went in and out of alliances with each other all the time, but you were talking about 11 different forces trying to keep track.

The most prominent army was the one that came out of the area very far north, called the Tibesti. It was run by two men. One was Goukouni, the other was Hissen Habr#. They were number one and two, in that order. Then Goukouni decided that Habr#, who had been educated in Paris, was smarter than he was, particularly in public relations, and he'd make Habr# the general, and he'd be the second man. This lasted for a number of years. These two received a great deal of support across the border from Libya, and were a very effective rebel force.

The two men had a falling-out somewhere along the line, and Goukouni decided he wanted to be in charge again, and he threw Habr# out. Habr# ended up without any backing at all, all by himself, in the northern part of Chad. He is probably one of the most remarkable guerrilla leaders of this century. In 30 days, he was back with a new army, beating both the government and Goukouni. This army was no tribal thing or anything else; he was a leader who was able to inspire other people to follow him out into the desert, and he's good. As a guerrilla leader, he's good.

About this point, the government decided, “Here is an opportunity. Maybe we can do something about this whole situation. We shall now have a government of national union.” They asked Habr# if he didn't want to join, since he'd fallen out with Goukouni and was now denouncing Qadhafi. He said, “Sure, I'll join.” So he came back into the city and they

formed a new government, in which Habr# was to be the vice president. This lasted for a few months, at which point something happened. We're not quite sure what happened, but something made Habr# think that the government was going to try and arrest him or assassinate him. Fighting broke out between his followers, who had followed him into the city, and the government forces.

Up to then, most of the fighting had been off in the north. Now the fighting was in the city itself, and very violent fighting between these two factions. Goukouni moved in with his forces from the north, sat on the outside of the city, waiting to see who was going to win. The other eight armies were taking advantage of the situation in their own locales, so they were up by Lake Chad or out in the east. It became a very confused situation.

In the actual fighting, Habr# finally prevailed and took over the government himself. The president, a military officer got the country. Several of the others fled into temporary exile. But most of them are now back and are now part of Habr#'s government. It was during that particular stage of fighting that my time was up in Chad.

Q: During this time, was this of no particular interest in the State Department?

BRADFORD: That was true, except for the safety of the Americans when fighting started in the city. We evacuated everybody in Chad, except about eight of us who stayed on in N'Djamena. Then everybody got out.

Q: How had you and your staff evaluated Habr# at the time?

BRADFORD: We had agreed, up to a limit, as I say, that he was a tremendous guerrilla military leader. We were very suspect of his abilities to run a government. He had not shown in that brief time that he was in there, although he was a smart man, that he could really run a government, which is different from running a guerrilla army and fighting, than running a government on a daily basis. He seems to have learned a lot or be doing much better since then.

Q: We really didn't care who won?

BRADFORD: No. As a matter of fact, one of the high points of the whole thing, I was caught outside of Chad when the actual fighting started. I was making a special inspection for the secretary of posts in the Sahel. We had a great many problems in the aid program and so forth, and they asked me, when I got back on leave in the States, to make a special inspection of all of the posts in the Sahel. So my wife and I had driven from N'Djamena over through northern Nigeria into Niamey, Ouagadougou, and Bamako. All along the way, we were plagued with stories that things were getting worse and worse in Chad. While we were there, actual fighting broke out in Chad. I kept calling the State Department and asking what was going on. They'd say, “Everything's calmed down now. Everything is fine.” I finally got to Bamako, and I called. I said, “How are things going?” They said, “We're evacuating the post.” I said, “You're what? You're evacuating the post?” I said, “Well, I'm going back.” “We don't think you should do that.”

At that point, I cut off communications with the Department, and I flew to Paris, from Paris back down to Cameroon. I chartered a plane to N'Djamena, flew up to the border of Chad, and crossed French troops going back into Chad. I set up operations there, in time to supervise the evacuees on an airplane and leave.

Q: This shows a little bit of the problem of communications in a place where, one, you can't talk to your post, and, second, you have to talk to the State Department. Then to get from hither to yon, you have to go from Bamako in Mali, and then you had to fly to Paris in order to get back to the Cameroon, to get to Chad.

BRADFORD: This is still the case although throughout Africa. Very few flights go east and west on the continent; they all go north and south.

Q: What did you do when you came back during the coup?

BRADFORD: We set up in two different residences in town, at opposite ends of the town. I stayed in the residence with three or four people, and my DCM stayed at the other end of town in another place with the same number of people. We had pretty good radio contact. One of the first things I did when I got back, I sent a note to Habr#, to the Imam, to Goukouni.

Q: Imam would be . . .

BRADFORD: The religious leader of the Moslem, very strong with Habr#. And four or five other leaders that I knew. The note basically said, “Look, fellows. We have evacuated all the Americans from the country except eight of us. We are in two residences, here and here, well marked. We are completely neutral in this fight. Whichever side wins, it would be a disaster if anything happens to the Americans that are left in the town.” I had a DCM who was a man of great local knowledge and real courage, Tony Delcimer. Tony personally delivered these notes to each of the fighters. There was sort of a lull in the fighting, but there was still an occasional outburst of gunfire. During the next three weeks, in which fighting became extremely heavy at some times, and the residence itself was located between the president's palace and Habr#'s line, so they found around us and over us and so forth, a big residence with thick walls, so we weren't in terrible danger or anything, but it was noisy. They scrupulously respected the residences. At no time did they come into it or shoot at us directly. A few ricochets was all.

One night, close to the end of the three-week period, I looked out in the garden and there were a bunch of troops coming over the wall. I thought, “Oh, my, they're going to come in here and set up a machine gun and mortar, shoot at the other side, and the other side will shoot back.” The officer came up to the door and banged on the door. I went to the door, and he apologized for cutting through my garden, but he had some wounded men, and the fighting on the street was too heavy to evacuate him. They went across my garden, over to the other wall, and disappeared. That's the only time they touched the residence. When you think that the people were fighting out there on the street, 50 yards away, were

brought up in the desert, the idea of neutrality and the American flag couldn't have meant beans to them.

Q: Absolutely not.

BRADFORD: What it meant was that Habr# had said, “Don't touch that house!” (Laughs)

Q: It shows discipline.

BRADFORD: It was incredible.

Q: When you think of the Congolese situation, the troops just ran wild.

BRADFORD: Correct.

Q: In Uganda and other places.

BRADFORD: A very different situation.

Q: What was the French role in this, as you saw it? What were your connections with the French?

BRADFORD: I had excellent relations with the French ambassador, who was one of their outstanding ambassadors. They have a situation similar to ours in the Foreign Service. They have a career ambassador called the ambassador of France. There's only one officer in Africa that's ever borne this title, and that was their ambassador in Chad, ambassador of France. They have a different quirk on it. Once you're an ambassador of France, you are not only an ambassador for life, you're on full pay for life. So no retirement. They don't use you, maybe, but you're always on full pay. At any rate, he was an absolutely magnificent man, but he, in effect, was semi-ruler of Chad. His army supported the government. As long as they supported the government, the government did well. When they decided they didn't want to support them quite that well, the government had to start negotiating.

They put pressure on them to negotiate with Habr# and the government. I think they were surprised that Habr# had taken over quite as quickly as he did.

Once the actual fighting started, they found themselves protecting a portion of the town with most of the Europeans in it, strictly on a defensive role, to take care of the Europeans.

Q: You're speaking of French troops.

BRADFORD: Yes. The French Embassy was there, and most of the French people were there. It was strictly a protective gesture.

Q: Did you find yourself deferring to the French ambassador in policy measures?

BRADFORD: Not so much in policy measures. I would defer to him socially. He was the ranking man, so far more important than I was. In fact, he was that much more important in the United States. We had policy differences, and we had a very nice gentlemen's agreement. There were things that occasionally I couldn't tell him, and there were things he couldn't tell me. We never pressed these items. We got along very well.

Let me go one step further. There was another thing that I think should be noted for our historical record. When it came time to evacuate all the Americans from N'Djamena, since I wasn't at the post, but my DCM sent me messages that it was time to get out. The US Government started dithering. “Should we send military planes? That might be misinterpreted. Should we charter a Pan Am plane? That's expensive.” While they were still dithering, the French ambassador arrived. He said the French Air Force was coming in to evacuate his civilians, and he would be more than glad to take the Americans out at the same time. Where did we want them to go? He was taking his people to Libreville, and it was getting a little crowded, but if we wanted ours to go somewhere else, that would be fine. So the French Air Force evacuated 400 or 500 Americans to Yaounde in Cameroon. There was never any question of a bill being submitted for this. As you know, when the

Americans evacuate one person of another nationality, we bill the government. All I could think of is some allies still know how to behave like allies.

Q: I think this is also interesting, that when all is said and done, in normal times, the French can be . . .

BRADFORD: A pain in the neck. (Laughs)

Q: A burr under the saddle. But when the chips are down, they can be relied on to do what we would say is the right thing. I hope they feel the same about us.

This is an unclassified interview, but did you feel that you received good support from the CIA?

BRADFORD: Yes. Excellent. I always maintained good relations with them. I always maintained a modicum of control without being too nosy in things they didn't want to talk about. My support was excellent.

Q: How did you view the threat from Qadhafi and Libya at that time in Chad?

BRADFORD: The Chadians were terribly concerned. By the time I'd been there a while, I was concerned in the sense that he was probably going to take over Chad or try and take over Chad. Was this important to the United States? The answer was probably no. It didn't really matter if Qadhafi took over Chad. It didn't matter if he took over part of Niger, too. Obviously, he couldn't take over much more than that without getting terribly over-extended. There aren't that many Libyans.

Q: Did you find that there was more concern, say, in the United States from the State Department and Congress?

BRADFORD: That grew, but it grew basically after I left. When I left, they were still not terribly interested in what was happening.

Q: Is there something I might not have covered from your time in Chad?

BRADFORD: No, I think that's about it. We've pretty well covered it all.

Q: Did you leave to retire?

BRADFORD: I had been there about three years, and the Department indicated that would be about it, that they were going to start looking for a replacement for me. On one of my trips back here during the fighting, I ran into my old friend John Anderson. John Anderson and I had known each other.

Q: This is Congressman John Anderson?

BRADFORD: Yes. We came into the Foreign Service together in 1952. We served together in Berlin, our first post. My wife was the matron of honor in their wedding. After Berlin, John decided he didn't really like the Foreign Service. He went back and became state attorney, then a member of Congress. We used to see John and Kiki every two or three years, have lunch with them, talk about old times, and that was it. At any rate, this time I met him and he asked me if I would come up to the Hill. I went up, and he said he had decided to run for President, and would I consider being his campaign manager. The two things came together. I was leaving Chad, didn't know where I was going. The best I could look forward to was probably another small African post. I had just done that for three years and loved it. An opportunity like this, I figured it was sort of once in a lifetime, and so I said yes. At that point, I gave them my resignation and went back to Chad, packed, came back, and took over John's campaign.

Q: The Foreign Service is renowned for not being that key to political life. Much of being a campaign manager is knowing the territory and knowing the people, having the connections.

BRADFORD: Everything you have said is true, but I think that there were a couple of things I learned at that point. The distrust in American politics is incredible. Every candidate, every candidate's family and friends think that he is being ill-served, there are spies in members of the other camp. Personal loyalty is almost the most important thing in a campaign worker. I gather John felt that from me he would get this personal loyalty, where somewhere else he might not.

The other thing is that the knowledge of the turf is tremendously important in a reverse sort of sense. The thing that a campaign manager does is raise money. Everything else, somebody else does. I came back with very grandiose ideas. We had position papers, and we created the most magnificent position papers probably in American history. We researched John's background, everything he'd ever said on issues, talked to him, made consistent points so that anybody that asked him about what he has said, here's what he believes. I went through six months of that campaign and nobody ever asked me for his position on anything. (Laughs) I don't know what they finally did with them.

Q: As a footnote, how did this all turn out?

BRADFORD: It turned out that I was with John until he decided that he might be an Independent candidate, and I came down very strongly that I thought it was a bad idea for several reasons, for his own personal reasons, for the country, and that I felt very uneasy with it, having raised by that time many millions of dollars from Republicans, telling him what a good Republican he was, and suddenly he wasn't a Republican. We left at that point. It was not acrimonious or anything else, but again, we're talking about a personal preference. I have never been close to him again since then. I've seen him from time to time, and he's friendly, but the closeness is gone.

Q: Before closing, I'd like to ask a question. In a way, this is what this oral history program is all about, but it also points out something about the Foreign Service that, in a way, is disturbing. That is the unwillingness of serving officers to draw on knowledge of officers

who have gone before, even in time of crises. I wonder if you could explain a little about your experience in this.

BRADFORD: When I left, I was still full of beans, wanting to do things and so forth. After the election, Chad fell apart again, and I thought, “Ah! The State Department will call me now.” This was in 1980. “After all, I know Habr# personally, I know Goukouni personally, I know this country, which is rather small, and a lot of things aren't on the map, but I know where they are. They're going to need my services.” They didn't need my services. There were never any telephone calls, nobody ever sought my views on anything. As I thought about it, I thought, “If I were a young officer trying to make my mark down there (and any of them who are any good are trying to make their mark), I don't think I'd want an older ambassador around here either. He might get in the way.”

There is something lacking in the system that doesn't call on knowledge that is so readily available and would normally be so willing to help. You wouldn't have to worry about a contract or anything else. Most of us would trot out at midnight and do our stint in the operations center, really just to get a taste of the action.

Q: This seems to be endemic in the system.

BRADFORD: I'm afraid it is.

Q: The unwillingness to draw on resources. Looking back on your Foreign Service career, what do you feel personally was your greatest accomplishment?

BRADFORD: I think probably my stint as Executive Director in AF. You asked me what I had accomplished. My accomplishments are not that I created any new systems or any such things that are lasting today. But for seven years, we ran an operation and ran it very, very well. I think that's important. That's what administration is all about. It's not creating monuments; it's running things.

Q: Let's say a young friend or member of your family comes to you and says, “Mr. Ambassador, should I go into the Foreign Service?” What would you say?

BRADFORD: I think this is a very personal thing. I would not tell anybody, “Oh, you don't want to go into the Service. It's terrible.” But conversely, I wouldn't say, “Oh, everything is great in the Service. You'll love it.” It's a matter of personal conviction. Anybody who really wants to do it, by all means. But they've got to make up their mind. If they want me to tell them the bad things and the good things, I would try.

Q: I want to thank you very much. I appreciate this.

BRADFORD: I want to thank you for the opportunity. Above all, it's nice to talk about these things and have somebody listen.

End of interview